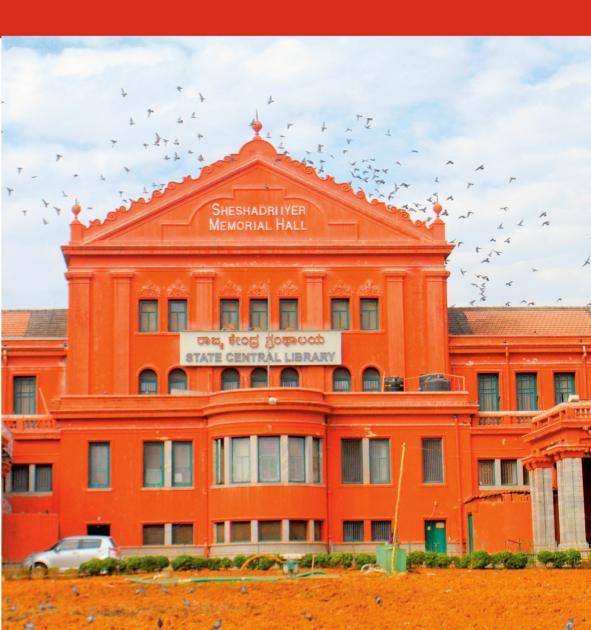# The Public Library Movement in India

Bedrock of Democracy and Freedom

Lawrence Liang and Aditya Gupta

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The Public Library Movement in India: Bedrock of Democracy and Freedom

Lawrence Liang and Aditya Gupta

Authors:

> Dr. Lawrence Liang is Professor of Law and Dean of the Ambedkar University Delhi School of Law. Professor Liang also serves as a Distinguished Public Resource Fellow.
>
> Aditya Gupta is a Public Resource Fellow.

Cover Art:

> Sheshadri Iyer Memorial Hall, Bangalore State Central Library. Photo by Augustus Binu, Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0.

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1. Introduction: Public Libraries and Librarians as Nation-Builders

Conventional narratives of nation building often foreground the role played by renowned figures including politicians, lawyers, scientists, and other notable individuals who are celebrated for their contributions to shaping a nation's trajectory.[1] In the Indian context, the anti-colonial struggle witnessed a rich and varied assemblage of voices and actors who played a pivotal role in fashioning the nation's collective identity and aspirations, and It has become almost trite to invoke the examples of luminaries such as Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, and a host of eminent political leaders and intellectuals as the architects of modern India. Yet, amid the spotlight on these well-known figures, there exists a range of marginal figures whose contributions are frequently overshadowed or elided within these dominant nationalist narratives.

One such overlooked class are librarians, who have played a critical yet often understated role in the intellectual and

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1 *See* Ramachandra Guha, MAKERS OF MODERN INDIA (Penguin India, 2013); Ananya Vajpeyi, RIGHTEOUS REPUBLIC: THE POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN INDIA (Harvard University Press, 2012).

cultural evolution of the nation.[2] The profession of librarianship in India, although historically neglected in conventional discourses of nation-building, has been instrumental in the democratization of knowledge, the preservation of cultural heritage. In this paper, using the example of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, often described as the father of the libraries movement in India, we attempt to excavate the role of librarians as architects of constitutional values such as liberty, equality and justice. The crucial contributions of librarians are frequently overshadowed or relegated to the periphery. This oversight belies the profound impact that librarians have on nurturing the intellectual and cultural foundation of a nation. While politicians and lawyers play pivotal roles in shaping legal frameworks, policies, and governance structures, librarians operate on a different yet equally significant front.

It is mistakenly assumed that the work of librarians is limited to cataloguing, curating and conserving texts. In a country marked by sharp inequalities, complex socio-cultural dynamics, and varying degrees of literacy,

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[2] Nicholas Basbanes. PATIENCE & FORTITUDE: A ROVING CHRONICLE OF BOOK PEOPLE, BOOK PLACES, AND BOOK CULTURE (Harper, 2001).

librarians act as facilitators of access to knowledge, bridging the gap between those with access to learning and those without. Librarians have to preserve public memory even as they nourish a robust imagination of the public sphere, thereby fostering a culture of intellectual inquiry and democratic debate. The role of librarians as educators, conservators, and facilitators of intellectual engagement cannot be underestimated, and in that sense, one can see them as the unacknowledged architects and unacknowledged legislators of modern India.

The role of librarians extends beyond the confines of physical libraries, and it would be very limiting to assume that the library is solely a physical institution. Following Alberto Manguel, one could argue that beyond their institutional manifestation, libraries also possess a metaphorical essence.[3] The idea of the library as a universal ideal has traversed the epochs of human civilization, encapsulating a collective longing for knowledge and self-awareness.[4] This aspiration has transcended geographical

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[3] Alberto Manguel, THE LIBRARY AT NIGHT (Yale University Press, 2009).

[4] Stuart Kells, THE LIBRARY: A CATALOGUE OF WONDERS (Reprint edition. Counterpoint, 2019).

boundaries and temporal divisions, and the library in a sense has served as a lodestone of human curiosity, intellectual exploration and achievement.[5] From the ancient libraries of Alexandria to the modern public libraries of today, this institution has evolved while retaining its fundamental purpose – to nurture and disseminate knowledge. Through the shifting tides of history, the library has often remained a sanctuary for wisdom, sheltering ideas from the erosions of time. In the digital age, they navigate the complexities of information overload, misinformation, and digital literacy. Librarians curate online resources, teach information literacy skills, and guide individuals through the labyrinth of digital information. Their efforts contribute to fostering a digitally literate citizenry capable of navigating the intricacies of the contemporary world.

In recent discourse, one metaphor that has emerged to describe libraries is that of the library as a "fighting concept."[6] This characterisation locates the place of the library within the history of larger socio-political struggles

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[5] *See* Matthew Battles, LIBRARY: AN UNQUIET HISTORY (W. W. Norton, 2003), Oliver Tearle, THE SECRET LIBRARY (Michael O'Mara, 2017).

[6] Tomislav Medak & Marcel Mars, JAVNA KNJIŽNICA (PUBLIC LIBRARY) (WHW Multimedia Institute, 2015).

in which public libraries emerge as bastions of empowerment and resistance. This is best exemplified for instance in the pro-democracy protests that took place in Gezi park in Istanbul in 2013, where amongst other strategies, protesters assembled in public squares holding books in their hands, reading literature as an act of resistance. The notion of the library as a "fighting concept" imagines the library as a platform that facilitates access to education and critical thinking, thereby enabling societal transformation. Medak and Mars write "In the catalog of history the institution of public library is listed in the category of phenomena of which we humans are most proud of. Along with free public education, public healthcare, the scientific method, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Wikipedia, free software…It's one of those almost invisible infrastructures that we start to notice only once they go extinct. A place where all people can get access to all knowledge that can be collected seemed for a long time a dream beyond reach – until the egalitarian impetus of social revolutions, the Enlightenment idea of

universality of knowledge, and the exceptional suspension of the commercial barriers of copyright made it possible."[7]

It is also a concept that we can trace back to specific historical moments such as the anti-colonial struggles and the civil rights movement. Anti-colonial movements sought to reclaim agency, identity, and culture in the face of imperial oppression. The public library, with its democratizing ethos, became an instrument of defiance. It enabled colonised subjects to reclaim their political identity and heritage, and the library by this account becomes a tool of empowerment, a shelter for articulating suppressed voices, and a medium for nurturing social and political transformation. Transformative contributions which emerged in the aftermath of colonial subjugation had similar normative aspirations, with their promise of securing liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. Borrowing from this constitutional vocabulary, we advocate the extending the idea of the library as a fighting concept and conceptualising it as a "fraternal concept," an

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[7] Tomislav Medak & Marcel Mars, PUBLIC LIBRARY, A FIGHTING CONCEPT!, Scholosspost Blog (December 19, 2014).

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"emancipatory concept" and a "transformative concept."[8] It is utterly unsurprising that Dr. B.R.Ambedkar was one of the most prominent bibliophiles in modern India, and he famously argue that every person should spend at least 10% of their income on books. While there is a scattering of material documenting his love for books and libraries, we unfortunately do not have a single comprehensive history of Dr. Ambedkar the reader.[9]

Constitutional ideals of equality and liberty often have roots that predate their formal recognition as legal rights and entitlements. These origins can be discovered in rather unexpected contexts. For instance, examining the history of filmgoing in India provides an intriguing perspective. Film theatres, it has been shown, emerged as novel public spheres, opening access to spaces that were previously off-limits to many due to class, caste and gender constraints.

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[8] *See* Aakash Singh Rathore, AMBEDKAR'S PREAMBLE: A SECRET HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA (Oxford University Press, 2019). Rathore argues that Ambedkar infused the Preamble with his vision of social justice, equality, and individual liberty, and in particular was responsible for the introduction of the idea of fraternity into the preamble, because he believe that in the absence of fraternity, the political ideals of liberty and equality would not be fulfilled.

[9] For scattered observations on Ambedkar the bibliophile *see* Salim Yusufji, Ambedkar: THE ATTENDANT DETAILS (Navayana, 2017), Ashok Gopal. A PART APART: THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF B. R. AMBEDKAR. (Rupa Publications, 2019)

This transformation marked a departure from established norms, as people from various strata of society gained entry to these spaces, once reserved for those of higher social standing.

Film historians such as Sivathamby have demonstrated how movie halls in colonial South India became contested spaces of inclusivity. He notes for instance "The Cinema Hall was the first performance centre in which all Tamils sat under the same roof. The basis of the seating is not on the hierarchic position of the patron but essentially on his purchasing power. If he cannot afford paying the higher rate, he has either to keep away from the performance or be with all and sundry."[10] Lower-caste individuals, who were historically relegated to the margins, could now boast of sharing spaces with those of higher castes. This subtle yet powerful transformation demonstrated the potential of public spaces to challenge traditional societal divides and embody the ideals of equality and social integration. In that sense, the history of a public space like a cinema hall provides us with an anticipatory story of the legal struggle for equality, which finally manifest itself in provisions such

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[10] K. Sivathamby, THE TAMIL FILM AS A MEDIUM OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION (New Century Book House, 1981).

as article 14 and article 15 of the Constitution of independent India.

In a similar vein, the history of libraries offers a fascinating parallel. Libraries, with their promise of universal access and the emancipatory potential of literacy and learning, embodied principles of equality well before they were formally enshrined in the constitution. Just as cinema theatres served as catalysts for social change, libraries anticipated and realized the constitutional commitments to equality. Public Libraries, with their open doors and unfettered access to knowledge, prefigured the constitutional principles that would later be enshrined in law. The ethos of universal access within library spaces laid the groundwork for the broader vision of equality that constitutional framers would formalize. Libraries became spaces where individuals transcended their backgrounds and engaged in a collective pursuit of knowledge, foreshadowing the notion of equality that would later be articulated in legal and constitutional terms. Through their dedication to providing free and open access to information, libraries combat inequalities in education and empower individuals to challenge societal injustices.

Simultaneously, the library serves as a fraternal concept, fostering a sense of community and belonging. It provides a space where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together, engage in dialogue, and exchange ideas, transcending cultural boundaries. Beyond its role as a fighting and fraternal concept, the library assumes an essential role in equalizing society. By ensuring that information is accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic status or cultural background, the library becomes a catalyst for social change. It promotes social mobility, empowers disadvantaged communities, and dismantles barriers that hinder progress. These unassuming spaces laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and egalitarian society, and their significance as precursors to constitutional principles should not be underestimated.

An interesting comparison can be made with the civil rights movement in the U.S. Mike Selby provides us with an insight into a crucial yet often overlooked story of the Civil Rights Movement: the establishment and operation of "Freedom Libraries" in the southern United States during

the tumultuous 1960s.[11] Racial segregation was not limited to educational institutions and other public spaces but also meant a systematic denial of access to public libraries. Selby chronicles the origins of "Freedom Libraries," which emerged as grassroots initiatives in response to the pervasive racial discrimination that permeated the South. The movement became particularly significant after the judgement of the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education which ended segregation in schools.[12] Told through a fascinating portrayal[13] of courageous individuals —activists, educators, and volunteers— the book highlights the obstacles faced by the Freedom Libraries, ranging from legal barriers and bureaucratic resistance to outright hostility and violence from segregationists. Despite these formidable challenges, the libraries became invaluable

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[11] Mike Selby, FREEDOM LIBRARIES: THE UNTOLD STORY OF LIBRARIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE SOUTH (Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).

[12] BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

[13] Selby narrate an interesting account In 1938, a 9-year old boy walked two blocks from his house over to the "Negro library," selected two books, went up to the librarian's desk and pushed the books and his library card over and asked Annie McPheeters, the long-time librarian, to check them out for him. She told the young boy that the books were "adult only" books, but if he ran home and got his father's library card, he could have the books. The books were about Gandhi and the boy was Martin Luther King, Junior.

bastions of knowledge, offering access to books, periodicals, and educational materials that were otherwise inaccessible to African Americans. Selby argues that the Freedom Libraries play the critical role in nurturing intellectual curiosity, fostering critical thinking, and promoting literacy within African American communities. Beyond serving as repositories of information, these libraries emerged as vibrant hubs of cultural exchange, political organizing, and resistance against systemic oppression. A perfect example of the library as a fighting concept can be found in the story of five. African American men, entering the Alexandria Public library and requesting library cards. When refused, they walked to the bookshelves, took a book and sat down to read quietly. When they were ordered to leave by the police and refused, they were arrested for disorderly conduct. While similar parallels can be drawn to the history of libraries in India, the work of producing a comparable account for India similar to Selby's, remains to be done.

2. S. R. Ranganathan : The Librarian as Nation Builder

No account of the contribution of libraries to the making of modern India would be complete without a comprehensive assessment of the seminal work by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (1892–1972). Putatively considered the father of library science in the country, Ranganathan's influential "Five Laws of Library Science" constituted a radical reimagination of library services, directed towards a more user-centric and democratic approach to information access. His technical innovation, notably the Colon Classification system, though not universally adopted as a standard, was ground-breaking in the field of library sciences. More importantly, his philosophical perspectives on the role of libraries in public life and his pivotal involvement in drafting and promoting public library legislation across various Indian states remain an unparalleled contribution to the democratization of knowledge. This places him as a critical figure in library sciences both nationally and internationally. However, we contend that understanding Ranganathan's historical significance necessitates a broader contextualization beyond merely the evolution of public libraries. This is appropriately reflected in C. Rajagopalachari's comparison of Ranganathan's stature in international library circles to

Jawaharlal Nehru's place in global politics.[14] Another scholar goes even further and likens Ranganathan's impact on library science to Einstein's influence on physics.[15]

His contributions have to be read in the backdrop of the tensions and paradoxes of the transition that India made from a colonial to a postcolonial society. George Roe says "Western interest in Ranganathan has not tended to recognize the importance of the epic political struggles that were taking place in India during his lifetime and that had a profound influence on his library work. It is no coincidence that the most creative phase of Ranganathan's life—the 1920s and 1930s—which saw the publication of The Five Laws of Library Science (1931),[16] Colon Classification (1933),[17] and Classified Catalogue Code (1934),[18] was also

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[14] George Roe, *Challenging the Control of Knowledge in Colonial India: Political Ideas in the Work of S. R. Ranganathan*, 26 LIBRARY & INFORMATION HISTORY 18, 29 (2010).

[15] Mohinder Partap Satija, *A Living Library: Padma Shri SR Ranganathan (1892-1972), the Sole Architect of Indian Library Movement*, 12 BIBLIOTHECAE. IT 279, 284 (2023).

[16] S.R. Ranganathan, THE FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE, Madras Library Association (1931)

[17] S.R. Ranganathan, COLON CLASSIFICATION, Madras Library Association (1933)

[18] S.R. Ranganathan, CLASSIFIED CATALOGUE CODE, Madras Library Association (1934)

a highpoint in the struggle for Indian independence, and one which posed fundamental questions over the movement's strategy and leadership" (Roe, 2010, p. 19). He suggests that Ranganathan's library theory is infused with political references to Indian independence and nationalism (Roe, 2010, p. 19)

Ranganathan was born in Tanjavoor District of Madras in 1892, and was initially trained as a mathematician. After teaching mathematics for seven years, he was appointed as the first librarian of Madras university in 1924. This marked a turning point in his career as well as the history of libraries in India. In September 1924, he went to England to study western practices of librarianship, and his time there left a profound impression on him. In England, Ranganathan appreciated the role played by libraries as community reading centres, and found in them an equalising instinct, serving as they did, all strata of society. During his visit, he was impressed by the contribution made by the British Libraries to the development of a political culture and he saw a sharp contrast with the state of libraries in India. In India, libraries functioned out of the efforts of individuals, and rarely enjoyed government

patronage. Ranganathan's experience in Britain helped him realise how open access to information and libraries can be leveraged as a force of democracy. After Ranganathan moved back to India, "neither he nor library science remained the same."[19]

Ranganathan's ambivalent admiration of the library system that he saw in England needs to be understood within a larger historical and theoretical context of the anxieties that defined the encounter of educated Indians with the West. Scholars of postcolonial theory have variously characterised this encounter as one that was simultaneously predicated on a desire to mimic the West even as it strove to distinguish itself from the West. Partha Chatterjee distinguishes between what he describes as the 'inner' and 'outer' domains of the Indian subject in the context of colonialism. For Chatterjee, the 'outer' domain refers to the realm of the state, governance, economy, science, and technology, which were areas that were subjected to Western control and influence. Colonized societies were compelled to accept Western superiority in these domains due to the apparent progress and success that the Western

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[19] Satija, *op. cit., 284.*

methods demonstrated. On the contrary, the 'inner' domain symbolizes the spiritual, religious, and cultural essence of the colonized society, where the natives often sought to preserve their distinct identity. In this sphere, the colonized people asserted their autonomy and resisted Western control, safeguarding their traditional values and norms. Chatterjee's dichotomy serves as a unique analytical framework to understand how colonized societies negotiated their existence under colonial rule. It reflects the complex interplay between assimilation and resistance, and the struggle to maintain cultural integrity while adapting to the realities of colonial governance. The interplay between the "inner"and "outer" domains simultaneously reveals the hegemony exerted by the colonizers alongside the resilience and agency of the colonized.

Ranganathan's biographer, Girija Kumar, observes that Ranganathan similarly had this dual aspect with his intellectual outlook being essentially Western even as his cultural self was deeply rooted within Indian tradition. Kumar informs us that during his stay in England, Ranganathan continued to wear Indian clothes and Hindu religious markings as an assertion of pride in his national

identity. George Roe attributes this self-conscious choice to Ranganathan's awareness that his intellectual inspiration, the noted mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, had tragically been unable to reconcile these two different aspects of his self, leading to his nervous breakdown and early death.[20] By contrast, Ranganathan seem to have straddled both these words with relative ease, and was known to be fond of quoting from Indian Scriptures even as he embarked upon a scientific overhaul of the library system in India.[21]

In this context, it is useful to see the parallels between Ranganathan's ambivalence and that of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Both Gandhi and Nehru were educated in England and spent a considerable time in England and elsewhere before returning to India to become a part of the independence movement. While Gandhi was influenced by Western legal and ethical ideas, he maintained a deep commitment to the idea of Indian tradition and forcefully articulated a rejection of Western

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[20] Roe, *op. cit.,* 19.

[21] Girija Kumar, Creativity in the thought of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, ANNALS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE AND DOCUMENTATION 1992, 39(2), 46-51(1992), 46.

ideas and ideals. His understanding of Swaraj consisted of not just a political rejection of the West, but also an ontological and epistemological disavowal. In stark contrast, Nehru, wholeheartedly embraced western modernity. He attributed the underdevelopment of India during the colonial period to the fact that India had missed out on becoming properly modern and needed to catch up with the West. In political terms, while Gandhi emphasised the return to an idea of village governance, for Nehru, the logical end of the anti-colonial struggle would have to be an independent nation governed on the principles of modernity and state driven development. Their contrasting philosophies differently navigated the world of the universal versus the particular. Roe suggests that Ranganathan's ideology and approach to his vocational calling is perhaps closest to Gandhi's idea of constructive work.[22] The philosophy of self-reliance that underwrote much of what Gandhi advocated in his writings as well as his practice of spinning significantly influenced many spheres of life in the freedom struggle, and one can glimpse in Ranganathan's fierce articulation of the library as an

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[22] Roe, *op. cit.,* 22.

institution of self-actualisation, echoes of these Gandhian principles.

During his stay in Britain, Ranganathan observed a complete contrast between the state of libraries in colonial India and those in England. The libraries in England could properly be characterised as public institutions supported and nurtured by the state. On the other hand, without an overarching library movement in India, libraries were dependent on private initiative or aristocratic patronage. The "civilizing mission" of the British had left independent India with an illiteracy rate of 85 per cent of the population[23] and, for Ranganathan, libraries were an integral part of the task of nation-building: "India has yet to realise how much her progress in governmental, industrial, educational, cultural and international affairs has to depend on a well-planned national library grid. India's independence implies the freedom to develop her library system on a nationwide basis and the obligation to develop her library personality so as to become a peer of other nations in the library sphere."[24]

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[23] Roe, *op. cit.,* 27.

[24] Roe, *op. cit.,* 28.

After his return to India, Ranganathan sought to implement many of the library practices that he had encountered in England. His primary concern was to expand the usage of the University library, and accordingly introduced a variety of outreach programs which gradually led to the University library acquiring a niche amongst the intelligentsia of Madras. If hitherto, the library had literally been reduced to a museum (the library was even housed in the city's museum), Ranganathan began by disrupting the traditional spatial arrangements. Presiding over the library's move to a new building, Ranganathan introduced open access and re-catalogue then classified the holdings of the Madras University. Library using Colon classification.

One of the interesting developments introduced by the revitalized Madras University Library was home delivery of books in an attempt to create a social awakening for the value of libraries. Amongst the most significant contributions that he made at this time was the formation of the Madras Library Association (MALA) in 1928. The twin aims of the association was to promote the library movement and to generate a trained work force for the libraries to run on scientific lines. Significantly contributing

to the development of the library movement, MALA pushed the library movement to the far corners of the Madras Presidency. During his presidency, MALA advocated for libraries to be a means of enabling the self-education of the user, through the development of critical faculties. There was also an overlap between the political domain and library movement as many of the founding members of MALA were also supporters of the Congress and these non-library members viewed the library movement as the means through which the ideology of the nationalist movement would be able to percolate to the rural poor across India.[25] As a part of their outreach efforts, MALA started a bullock-driven library that went from village to village, educating people about Gandhi's emphasis on universal education as well as the importance of libraries as a means to such education. Highlighting the success of this mission, Roe informs us that between July 1936 and December 1938, the travelling libraries were able to visit 471 villages in the Thanjavur district alone, while seventeen villages opened their own libraries and reading rooms. Beginning from his home state, Ranganathan was

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[25] Roe, *op. cit.,* 22.

eventually moved to the national stage, occupying important positions in places such as the Banaras and the University and eventually playing an important role that the level of policy-making as the President of the Indian library Association.

3. Ranganathan's philosophy of libraries: The Five Laws of Library

What distinguishes Ranganathan as a pioneer in the field of library sciences is the manner in which he brought together the three overlapping and yet often segregated domains of library theory, library practice and library policy. Central to the imagination of all three however was a fundamental belief that there should be "free access to knowledge for all." Ranganathan believed that the aim of free education could not materialize without a free book service for all, and he insisted that universal education without a free book service for all is like a "*mud house without a roof.*"[26] In a 1958 paper on the purpose of a library, Ranganathan wrote about the purpose of library in "Library System and

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[26] Quoted in M. P. Satija, Public Library Planning and Legislation in India; Role of S.R. Ranganathan, 39 SRELS JOURNAL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT 255 (2002).

Increasing Purpose,"[27] listing out amongst other things the economic advantages of a robust library culture, its contribution to research and most importantly, the importance of libraries as one of the safeguards of democracy.

Arguably, the most significant contribution made by Ranganathan to the philosophy of library sciences was his formulation of the five laws of library science, which till date remain a gold standard that is effortlessly regurgitated by all librarians. Developed in 1931, it is impressive how his five laws have stood the test of time and they remain the "sum and summary of his entire library philosophy and became the fountain head of all his later writings."[28] These laws are:

1. Books Are For Use

2. Every Reader His/Her Book

3. Every Book Its Reader

4. Save The Time Of The Reader

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[27] S.R. Ranganathan, Library System and Increasing Purpose, 7 LIBRI (1957).

[28] Satija, *op. cit.,* 283.

5. The Library Is A Growing Organism

The five laws have served as the moral lodestone of what libraries should be, and they remain the guiding normative principles for many librarians across the world. Ranganathan was guided by the principle that libraries are not private collections which showcase or hoard their catalogue, rather they are intended "to actively to promote the use of collections." Ranganathan's five laws are unique as they place positive obligations on libraries to maximise access both at the level of "reader services and in the curation of materials."[29]

In contemporary times, the five laws have been reinterpreted and reimagined by many other librarians, and some supplemental laws have also been developed. Underlying the seemingly simple proposition that "books are for use" is an important critique of the historic importance that libraries previleged preservation at the cost of ensuring access. The fundamental tenet of this first principle as a reformulation of a utilitarian understanding of the use value of a book rather than the reification of its

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[29] Lawrence Liang, India: The Knowledge Thief,,in Joe Karaganis (ed.), SHADOW LIBRARIES: ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE IN GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION (MIT Press, 2018), 194.

abstract value as a valuable commodity. Years later, a pioneer in the field of film archiving, Henri Langlois, would echo Ranganathan's philosophy when he said that the best way to preserve films was to screen them. Ranganathan held onto a firm conviction that the vital principle of the library is that "it is an instrument of universal education, and assembles together and freely distributes all the tools of education and disseminates knowledge with their aid." Studying the relevance of the first law in the age of digitisation, multiple authors suggest that "if conversion from analogue to digital creates many more users for the one title then I am sure Ranganathan would have welcomed such a process with open arms." The law is also location-agnostic, books should be made available to people beyond the confines of the physical library. Digitalisation provides a promising opportunity in this respect as well.

The second and the third law are framed through an interesting inversion- the second law says "every reader his or her book," while the third says "every book its reader." The former foregrounds the rights of the reader and links an institutional ideology with the goal of individual self-

actualisation. Much before a constitutional recognition of the right to read or even an idea of readers rights, the second law is prescient in its articulation of these core ideas. The third law interestingly advances a non-human perspective, that grants an ontological agency to the object- the book, much before many contemporary theories of object oriented philosophy. What does it mean to imagine the autonomy of a book, or the rights of a book to a readership? The affective language of intimacy suffuses the third law in a manner uncharacteristic of the impersonal language that one associates with policy documents or legal propositions. It enjoins the interests of books and readers within a relational vortex that transcends even a language of rights and brings them within an ambit of a care ethics. The laws then are not merely prescriptions by way of normative commands, and can rather, be read as principles that define the ethical horizons of technologies and institutions of knowledge. In his reassessment of the five laws, Patrick Carr advances an argument that the five laws can be read through the prism of "social construction of technology," as this allows us to appreciate their utility across time. In the context of digital transformations, Carr suggests that the laws serve as foundational principles

which measure the extent to which technological transformations are able to achieve their normative goals.[30]

The last law: library is a growing organism has a relatively unique space even amongst the other laws, and for Ranganathan, its uniqueness emerges from its emphasis on the "vital and lasting characteristics of the library" rather than its functionalities. The last law, using a biological metaphor, envisions the library as a living, breathing and growing organism, and as with all other biological organisms, should be seen in terms of their ability to adapt, mutate and transform. One can also read into the final law, a distinction between the form and content of a library. As an essential attribute of growing organisms, both form and content necessarily have to change over a period of time. Thus, if the ancient library consist primarily of papyrus scrolls, and these were replaced in turn by books with the advent of the print revolution, then how do we imagine a contemporary library where materials have the potential to be transformed into digital objects as well as being born digital. And if the library is an ideal across time, and the

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[30] Patrick L. Carr, Reimagining the Library as a Technology: An Analysis of Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science within the Social Construction of Technology Framework, THE LIBRARY QUARTERLY, VOL. 84, NO. 2 (APRIL 2014), 152-164.

ideal contains within it the fact that libraries are growing organisms, it allows a large amount of flexibility in imagining how the ideal can be actualised, independent of specific technological forms or historic moments that define what a Library is, in a particular context.

4. Foundations of the Library Movement in India: The Story of Baroda

Just as crucial as the political environments influencing the development of Ranganathan's philosophy are the historical circumstances. Both realms significantly contribute to understanding and conceptualizing his ideas. While Ranganathan played a pivotal role in energizing and connecting various regional library movements, it is essential to contextualize his work within the broader scope of the Indian library movement, which informed and influenced his contributions.[31] The foundations of the Indian Library Movement, and the realisation of the role of libraries and literacy in governance, can be traced back to the state of Baroda at the turn of the 20th century. The

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[31] For instance there are two ideas that Sayajirao and Ranganathan framed in almost identical terms, the metaphor of "a mud house without a roof" and the role of libraries as a means of perpetual learning.

architect of this vision and its realization in State administration was Maharaja Gopalrao Sayajirao III (1863-1939). Despite being born into humble peasant surroundings, he was adopted as the heir to the Baroda throne with the approval of the British authorities.[32] It was after his confirmation to the Baroda throne, that Sayajirao began his intensive and extensive training and education. During his time on the throne, he came to recognize the importance of education, and was also acutely conscious of its absence in his early years.[33] What the Maharaja could not avail for himself as a child, he set out to extend to his population.[34] His project for the State of Baroda started

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[32] Anthony X. Soares (ed.), SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES OF SAYAJI RAO III MAHARAJA GAEKWAR OF BARODA, VII (Oxford University Press,1927).

[33] Murari Lal Nagar, SHRI SAYAJIRAO GAIKWAD, MAHARAJA OF BARODA: THE PRIME PROMOTER OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES (Missouri: International Library Center,1992).

[34] Alban G. Widergy (ed.), 1 SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES OF HIS HIGHNESS SAYAJI RAO III, (Cambridge: The Univbersity Press, 1927). "Yet above all else, whether we notice the ocassions or the contents of most of these Speeches and Adresses, it is evident, as it is in a survey of his actual administration, that it is education which has been the fundamental notive of His Highness' reign. From the commencement he grasped the vital truth that a people without the rudiments of education could not understand or take an intelligent part in, let alone appreciate at their true worth, the various aspects of his progressive policy...He looks chiefly to education not simply for progress of social conditions but also for industrial, commercial and economic advance generally."

with reforming the education system, making it more accessible and universal. He remarked, "Education is all important to India. It is the lever- the only lever- by which this vast country can be extricated from that stationary condition in which it has remained through incalculable ages."[35]. In 1891, he promised to subsidize the expenses of a schoolmaster and other necessary supplies to any village, that could promise an attendance of more than sixteen pupils.[36] One of the most prominent achievements in Baroda's crown was that it became the first territory amongst British Indian and the native states to have

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[35] It should be noted that the address was read out on the Maharaja's behalf by the Dewan. *Id.* at 17; Baroda's education system was appreciated by many visionary leaders of India. See, e.g., Shri Lrishnan, GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE, SELECT SPEECHES AND WRITINGS 145, 146 (NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, 2018). "Within the borders of India itself, the Maharaja of Baroda has set an example of enthusiasm in the cause of education, for which he is entitled to the lasting gratitude of the people of the country."

[36] Widergy, 1 SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES, *op.cit.* at 31–32.

compulsory free education which was extended to the entire State in 1906.[37]

The public library movement was a natural extension of the Maharaja's belief in educational reform.[38] He remarked that libraries are a "coping stone" for a populace which is

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[37] In 1983, before the compulsory education was introduced in the entire state, the Maharaja introduced the concept of compulsory education without "legislative violence" and only after its successful implementation was the concept expanded to the entire State of Baroda. "All boys from 7 to 12, and all girls from 7 to 10, were compelled to go to school, if they lived within a mile of the school, unless they were already educated up to the standard taught, and that was certainly not high. By 1906, the experiment was thought to have justified itself, and the scheme was extended to the whole Raj." Stanley Rice, 2 LIFE OF SAYAJI RAO III MAHARAJA OF BARODA 63–64 (Oxford University Press, 1931); Widergy, 1 SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES, OP. CIT. 203: "I have, however, endeavoured to introduce compulsory education throughout the State of Baroda and hope to see my people benefited by it. The measure has been working with satisfactory results in one part of the State for a number of years. Emboldened by the success of this experiment, I have decided to make primary education compulsory throughout the State, and absolutely free."

[38] Dutt Newton Mohun, BARODA AND ITS LIBRARIES, XXI (Baroda Central Library,1928). "His Highness soon realised that universal education required as an essential supplement to it a network of free public libraries which would keep literacy alive and enable men and women in rural areas to have access to sources of knowledge not hitherto open to them." It is safe to say that the Maharaja believed that education was an important element of his governance. For example, in an address in 1906, while arguing against early marriages, the Maharaja said, *"The education of the male and female population becomes a combined source of the prosperity of a nation. Early marriages are not at all desirable if you wish your future generation to be brave, morally pure and strong. Do not depend simply upon what I say, but look for yourselves into the thoughts, the books and the conditions of different countries. If you pay close attention to this subject you will come to know that you are wrong, and that the system of early marriages is disadvantageous."* Widergy, 1 SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES, *op.cit.* 219.

educated through compulsory education. They were created to provide "a continual feast of books, magazines, and newspapers lest their love for learning just kindled at their academic altar gets soon extinguished for want of further fuel in the form of free libraries and a supply for healthy literature."[39] In a state dominated by various problems, the Maharaja wanted the libraries to create a "divine discontent," by spurring a collective yearning to explore the wisdom of the past and learn about the contributions of the present.[40] Emphasizing the role of libraries as instruments of perpetual self-learning, the Maharaja believed that schools and colleges can only serve a limited purpose. He remarked "to provide education without providing means to continue it throughout life was like building a house without a roof to cover it."[41] For an individual to immerse themselves in the knowledge of others and achieve personal

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[39] N.C. Chakravarty, Lest We Should Forget, 3 BULLETIN 13, 15 (1967).

[40] Rice, 2 LIFE OF SAYAJI RAO III MAHARAJA OF BARODA, *op. cit.,* 72.

[41] Nagar, SHRI SAYAJIRAO GAIKWAD, MAHARAJA OF BARODA, op. cit.

growth, he needs to enroll in the "People's University—the library."[42]

4.1. Pioneering a Public Library System

The genesis of the Baroda library movement can be traced back to 1901, when a library was created in the town which was surrounded by a handful of villages.[43] Inspired by the success of the library, the Maharaja, instructed his Education Commissioner that, "It is necessary to establish libraries in every taluka or peta-mahal so that the rural people may get opportunities to read books, newspapers and periodicals."[44] An initial grant of INR 30000 was

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[42] 2 SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES OF SAYAJI RAO III MAHARAJA GAEKWAR OF BARODA, *op. cit.* But although the school may start him in his life's work, and the college carry him still further on, neither school nor college can take him to the end. To whatever end may be within the measure of his capacity, to that end he must strive himself. To reach that end he may mix with men of affairs, of the small though important affairs of his village or town, of the larger affairs of his State, of the still larger affairs of the Empire, of the greater affairs of the world. Or he may choose to cast his lot with the philosophers, with the thinkers of the age. But whether his mind inclines him to action or to meditation, he must first enroll himself as a pupil in "the people's university"—the library. He must saturate his mind with knowledge of the deeds of other men, that he may emulate them. He must study the thoughts of others, that from the basis of those thoughts he may rise to still higher flights.

[43] Devon Lee, THE PUBLIC PARALLEL: UNDERSTANDING SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BARODA PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM, Master's Dissertation (University of North Carolina, 2019).

[44] Nagar, SHRI SAYAJIRAO GAIKWAD, MAHARAJA OF BARODA, op. cit.

sanctioned for opening libraries in villages and for the diffusion of knowledge and awakening of interest in education and industrial movements. Apart from establishing the libraries, the Maharaja proactively sought to engage public participation for the library movement. Through the aid of Motibhai Amin, the Baroda administration started the *Mitra Mandal* (Society of Friends) *Libraries.* This movement entrusted the newly graduated teachers to start libraries in remote villages of the state. If a newly graduated teacher, with help of the villagers and the panchayat, sent a contribution of 10-15 INR, the Mitra Mandal would send them books and other materials worth INR 20-30. With the help of the teachers, 30 new Mitra Mandal libraries were started in 1906.[45]

The administration also prepared libraries with the State's financial assistance. The State granted an initial aid for the setup of a library. This grant consisted of books worth INR 100, along with INR 125 being sanctioned for the purchase of vernacular material. There was also an annual grant provided for the purchase of newspapers, journals and other

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[45] *Id.*

periodicals.[46] In order to avail these administrative allowances and create a library, the village or town community was required to provide a building and the necessary furniture to house the collection provided by the administration. The community was also required to contribute to a library maintenance fund to meet the expenses on updating the material and other administrative expenses.

Through the combined State and Private efforts, by 1908, 74 Mitra Mandal and 26 Circulating State sponsored Libraries were established, along with 60 reading rooms. By 1910, the number of the libraries and reading rooms in the state grew to 247.[47] While the private and administrative efforts led to a considerable increase in the number of libraries, the rate of growth was very slow.Rural and poor communities continued to consider the libraries as a dispensable luxury. As the movement grew, the old materials available with the libraries deteriorated due to the lack of supporting infrastructure, and the provision of new

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[46] Devon Lee, THE PUBLIC PARALLEL, op. cit.

[47] Murari Lal Nagar & M. A. Sahityacharya, PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN BARODA 1901-1949 (International Library Center, 1969).

materials remained limited. These issues started to haunt the continued development of the Baroda's library movement,[48] and it was clear that the administrative push for libraries needed reconsolidation.[49]

In 1910, while on a tour of the world, the Maharaja visited America, and was looking to onboard a librarian who could revolutionize the library system in Baroda.[50] During these travels, he met Mr. William Alanson Borden, who at the time, was a librarian at the Young Men's Institute at New Haven Connecticut from 1887-1910. On the invitation of the Maharaja, he came to India and was appointed to revitalize the Baroda library movement.[51] A new State Library Department was created by the administration and Borden was appointed as its Director. After concluding an initial survey, Borden estimated that there were over 241 libraries in Baroda, which held over 100,000 volumes. He reported to the Maharaja, "I find the library situation in

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[48] *Id.* at 45–48.

[49] Devon Lee, THE PUBLIC PARALLEL, *op. cit.*

[50] Reports suggest that inquiries for appointment of a librarian for Baroda were pending since 1909. Murari Lal Nagar, WILLIAM ALANSON BORDEN (1853-1931) : AN APOSTLE OF INTERNATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP (International Libraries Center,1992), 46-47.

[51] Rice, 2 LIFE OF SAYAJI RAO, op. cit., 73.

Baroda not only in advance of the rest of India, but much in advance of what I had been led to expect; and I had expected considerable."[52] The control over these libraries was stratified, some were under the control of the local municipality, while others were controlled by the Department of Education and the crown.[53] After his survey, Borden set out to alleviate the problems of regulation, infrastructure, cataloguing and support which plagued the Baroda Library System.[54]

The administrative apparatus created by Borden divided the Library Department into two executive sections: The Central Library at Baroda and three Country Libraries. With Central Library as the administrative head, the management of the entire library ecosystem was to be

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[52] Nagar, WILLIAM ALANSON BORDEN, *op. cit.,* 58.

[53] Nagar and Sahityacharya, PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN BARODA, *op. cit..,* 53; Nagar, WILLIAM ALANSON BORDEN, *op. cit.,* 58.

[54] Nagar, WILLIAM ALANSON BORDEN, *op. cit.*"I do not find any of these libraries adequately housed, nor do I find them shelved in such a manner as to make them most attractive to readers or convenient to those in charge. At the same time, those I have examined are excellently selected, are managed by intelligent and courteous Librarians and Assistants, and would undoubtedly be much used were their contents made easily accessible and their surroundings more attractive to the ordinary reading public."

carried out through these institutions.[55] The Central Library was entrusted with the responsibility of commissioning new libraries and maintaining old ones in the various talukas of Baroda.[56] Borden also worked with the Baroda administration to notify the Rules for the Formation of Free Public Libraries, which clearly mandated that the libraries had to be maintained without any distinction of class, color or creed.[57] Within the new system a partial amount for erection and maintenance of libraries was required to be collected by the residents, and the government provided a corresponding amount.[58] Borden continued working with the administration and identified a "library development scheme," which chalked out the minimum prerequisites for

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[55] Devon Lee, THE PUBLIC PARALLEL, *op. cit.,* 48

[56] Ratanchand Manchanda, The Library Movement in Baroda and Its Comparison with Library Conditions in the Punjab, 1 MODERN LIBRARIAN 61 (1930).

[57] Newton Mohun Dutt, BARODA AND ITS LIBRARIES, op. cit., 103.

[58] When the inhabitants of a village, town or prant raised INR 50, INR 300 or INR 700 respectively, the Government and the Prant Panchayat each assured an equal annual contribution for maintenance. When the people raised one third of the sum necessary to erect a library building, the Government and the Prant Panchayat agreed to furnish the other two thirds. A village library could be initiated by the people by contributing only INR 25 and the Government providing INR 75 and providing the library with a set of vernacular books valued at INR 100. Nagar and Sahityacharya, PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN BARODA, *op. cit.*

the establishment and maintenance of libraries for each Prant in Baroda. At the end of the second year of Borden's arrival, i.e., 1911, a total of INR 1,02,000 was spent from the state coffers towards the development of libraries. The result, out of the 100 towns with a population between 2000-4000, 71 had established public libraries. Out of the 326 villages with a population of 1000-2000, 119 had public libraires and out of the 2637 small hamlets which had a population of less than 1000, 75 had libraries.[59]

Apart from libraries for every constitutive unit of Baroda, the administration also prepared the provision for travelling libraries. The plan was to create supply through demand. A small travelling library was sent to a village and after some time when the villagers demanded access to newspapers and periodicals, the Central Library Dept. would help them to establish a reading room and then a library. A travelling library was sent to any village or town on a simple request. It was kept in charge of the Headmaster of the village school for a maximum period of three months. The villagers could borrow books from the library, provided the librarian knew the borrower. Notices were published in

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[59] *Id.* at 84.

various public places of the village announcing the arrival of a travelling library.[60]

Apart from creating a demand within the state through travelling libraries, the Baroda movement also accommodated the needs of its illiterate population. Various audio-visual materials such as including photographs, maps, charts, picture post-cards, stereographs, magic lantern slides, and cinematograph films, were acquired to facilitate participation from the state's illiterate population.[61] The Baroda libraries thus became an immense equalizing force, stimulating participation from every community of the populace, with curated experiences for women, children and the illiterate.[62]

Upon his departure in 1913, Borden highlighted the significant accomplishments during his tenure in Baroda, including the establishment of a Central Library in Baroda city. This Central Library, housing 200,000 volumes, not

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[60] *Id.* at 89–90.

[61] *Id.* at 90–91.

[62] Devon Lee, THE PUBLIC PARALLEL, *op. cit.,* 49. Borden is also credited with having prepared the first library science educational institute and a journal for the library in the country.

only served as a regular library but also functioned as a comprehensive resource, providing reference books to libraries throughout the entire hierarchy. Additionally, three smaller reference libraries, each containing 20,000 volumes, were established, along with thirty-eight libraries in principal towns, each housing 5,000 volumes. In each of the 426 large villages in the state, there were libraries consisting of 500 volumes, mostly in vernacular languages. Furthermore, standard libraries of 200 volumes, entirely in the vernacular, were set up in each of the 2,600 small villages. To cater to villages lacking the means for libraries, traveling libraries, making stops for three months in each of these villages.

The management structure involved a system of control running from the Central Library at Baroda down to the village level, with each unit largely self-governed. Notably, every library in the chain was made accessible to every citizen, irrespective of caste or social standing, emphasizing the commitment to providing free access to knowledge for all.[63] At the time of his departure, Borden noted, "What America could only dream of, Baroda could

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[63] Nagar, WILLIAM ALANSON BORDEN, *op. cit.,* 133–134.

do, and, in a measure, has done. The plan has been worked out and its fructification provided for. A few more years will see it accomplished."[64] However, Borden's vision for the Baroda library system did not materialize. After his departure, the Baroda library movement continued to decline. Partial blame for the demise of the Baroda movement has been attributed to the First World War, which made the purchase of books and periodicals extremely expensive.[65] The library system in Baroda was also the direct result of the Maharaja's motivation. After his death, the movement lagged, and later served as a lesson for library patrons for the importance of legislative-driven library movement, rather than one driven by administrative endeavor.[66]

5. The library movement in Kerala

The Baroda model of library development stood out for its distinctive top-down approach. It stemmed from the

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[64] *Id.* at 104.

[65] Devon Lee, THE PUBLIC PARALLEL, *op. cit.,* 53.

[66] KM Sivaraman, March for Library Legislation in Madras, in Prithvi Nath Kaula (ed.), LIBRARY SCIENCE TODAY: RANGANATHAN FESTSCHRIFT, VOL. 1 : PAPERS CONTRIBUTED ON THE 71ST BIRTHDAY OF DR S R RANGANATHAN (1965).

visionary recognition of the significance and relevance of libraries by the Maharaja. This visionary insight was then translated into tangible action through administrative prioritization and emphasis. In contrast, the model of library movement in Kerala followed a bottom-up trajectory. Here, the administration initially sowed the seeds of literacy, which gradually led to a grassroots realization of the importance of libraries. Subsequently, this grassroots movement was embraced and supported by the administrative regency, creating a symbiotic relationship between local initiatives and official endorsement.

At the turn of the 19th century, the state of Travancore was plagued with growing illiteracy. To counter the scourge of illiteracy and to create a positive educational society,[67] Gouri Parvathi Bai, the regent queen of Travancore, introduced free and compulsory education under State Control.[68] The guardians of the children in the age group of 5-10 were enjoined under the law to send their children to

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[67] R. Raman Nair, PUBLIC LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT IN KERALA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (South Indian History Congress, Dharawad, Karnataka University, 1991),

[68] *Id.*; A. Sreedhara Menon et al., KERALA DISTRICT GAZETTEERS: TRIVANDRUM (Trivandrum: Superintendent of Government Presses, 1962), 651.

primary schools.[69] She resolved that "the state should defray the entire cost of education of its people, in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by a diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the State may be advanced thereby."[70] The proclamation led to schools being established in several places and compulsory appointment of at least two teachers for every school.[71]

After the regent queen's demise, his successor, Maharaj Swathi Thirunal[72] continued these educational reforms. The Maharaj patronized the spread of English schools and opened the first English School in Thiruvananthapuram in 1834,[73] which was later renamed as "His Highness the

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[69] M. M. Kapoor, T.H. Sreedharan & J.C. Goyal, EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN KERALA: STRUCTURE, PROCESS, AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE (1994), 58.

[70] A. Paslithil, PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT: KERALA (Kalpaz Publications,2006), 24.

[71] Sadasyatilaka T.K. Velu pillai, TRAVANCORE STATE MANUAL, VOL. 3 (1940), 700.

[72] The spelling of his name is different in some texts.

[73] Kapoor, Sreedharan, and Goyal, op.cit., 58.

Maharaja's Free School."[74] While maintaining the system of scholarships, the school housed the facilities to educate up to 500 children. Despite the natural prejudice against foreign education, members of the most conservative and orthodox sections of the populace sought admission to the school.[75] In 1866, the Free School was raised to the status of college, and was finally elevated to the status of a university. [76] Commenting on the growth of modern education in Trivandrum, the Maharaja remarked, "It is gratifying to me to reflect that English education struck early root in Travancore, that under favorable auspices it has attained satisfactory growth."[77]

The spread of English education extended beyond the capital. Impressed by the performance of the free school, similar schools were opened by the State administration in Kayamkumar, Kottar and other places. While English education flourished, the Travancore government

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[74] A fees was eventually imposed in 1863, *see* A. Sreedhara Menon et al., *op. cit.,* 652; 3 TRAVANCORE STATE MANUAL *op. cit.,* 701.

[75] 3 VELUPILLAI TK, *OP. CIT.,* 701.

[76] JANET HADDOCK-FRASER, PETER RANDS, AND STEPHEN SCOFFHAM, LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION (BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, 2018).

[77] 3 TRAVANCORE STATE MANUAL *op. cit.,* 702

earmarked allotments for vernacular schools as well. The administration also sanctioned grants-in-aid to private schools.[78] Between 1872-1888 the number of government vernacular schools increased from 197 to 663.[79] Given the growing level of literacy in the State of Travancore, public libraries began emerging, both through state and private efforts. In a pioneering effort, the Maharaja partnered with the British Resident of Travancore to start the first public library in India, The Trivandrum Public Library, in the year 1829.[80] The Maharaja and the British resident took an active interest in the affairs of the library. The former being the patron and the latter the president. The library was primarily used by British officers.[81] However, the natives were allowed to read books by paying INR 1 as monthly

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[78] *ID.* AT 704.

[79] For more information on the government reforms related to education, see M.M. Kapoor, T.H. Sreedharan, J.C. Goyal, EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN KERALA (VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE, 1994), 59.This source mentions that the administration actually appointed administrators

[80] V P Ajithakumari & A. Francis, *Public Library System in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: An Investigation*, 52 SRELS JOURNAL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT 465 (2015); Raman Nair, *op. cit.,* 46.

[81] While the library was managed as a private club, it was called a public library but the subscription cost was very restrictive.

subscription.[82] Opposing the elitist and restrictive library model, the local residents formed a People's library in 1862.[83] Thus, by the year 1862, the state of Trivandrum enjoyed the unique laurel of having two libraries for its people. Later in 1898, both the libraries were merged and the Government took over its affairs. After the Government takeover, the two libraries were merged and opened to the public. "This in 1898, fifty years before the dawn of independence, the common people of Trivandrum were allowed entry into the temple of knowledge, during the reign of Shree Mulam Tirunal, which is an event as unique as the Temple Entry Proclamation."[84]

Comparable steps were also taken in the State of Cochin. At the insistence of the British Resident, 33 vernacular school were opened in Cochin in 1818.[85] In the next three years (1818-1821), three English schools were opened.[86] The government patronage of English education and the

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[82] Paslithil, *op. cit.,* 26.

[83] Paslithil, *op. cit.,* 26.

[84] Paslithil, *op. cit.,* 27.

[85] National Council of Education Research and Training, REVIEW OF EDUCATION IN INDIA, KERALA (Govt. of India Press, 1962), 3.

[86] National Council of Education Research and Training, *op. cit.,* 61.

work of English missionaries aided the spread of English education in the state, and these institutions ensured the provision of very efficient library services. R. Nair notes that "the products of these educational institutions realized the value of libraries. They took initiative in influencing the rulers to establish libraries in different parts of the country, so that libraries will be accessible to them in their public life also."[87] As a result of the popular movement, public libraries were started at Ernakulum (1869), Trichur (1873), Kottayam (1881), Tellichery (1901), Calicut (1924) and Cannanore (1927).

By the last quarter of the 19th century, the State of Cochin opened District Schools in all Taluks and also created grant-in-aid programs for private schools (1889).[88] Further, separate schools were started for boys and girls, with inspecting officers appointed to check the working of schools in the State of Cochin,[89] and all high school, both

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[87] Raman Nair, *op. cit.,* 138.

[88] Kapoor, Sreedharan, and Goyal, *op. cit.,* 59.

[89] *Id.* at 60.

private and government were brought under the direct control of the Dewan.[90]

To serve the literate population of the State of Cochin, voluntary organizations started public libraries were started in Ernakulum (1869), Trichur (1873). By 1926, the Cochin Government started establishing rural libraries under the supervision of Director of Libraries, and the number of public libraries rapidly increased.[91] By 1946, 17 public libraries, 5 large rural libraries and 224 small rural libraries were established in the State of Cochin.[92]

5.1. The establishment of the Library Organisations across Kerala

During the early 20th century, many private initiatives led to the creation of libraries across Kerala. However, a significant number of these libraries struggled to survive, highlighting the need for a more organized library movement.[93] The patrons of the movement coalesced

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[90] National Council of Education Research and Training, *op. cit.,* 3.

[91] Paslithil, *op. cit.,* 45.

[92] M Bavakutty, Library Movement in Kerala, 32 LIBRI 251 (1982).

[93] K.S. Ranjith, RURAL LIBRARIES OF KERALA (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Research Program on Local Level Development, 2004),

through various conferences,[94] and the first association for furthering the goals of the library movement was formed in Kerala, called the "Samhastha Kerala Pustakalaya Samiti," in 1931.[95] In order to create a more unified and focused effort, 47 small libraries from Travancore established the All Travancore Grandhasala Sangham in 1945.[96] This organization played a pivotal role in categorizing libraries and allocating government grants based on their status. Writing about the importance of this association, PN Panicker notes, "the idea of central affiliating organization for the libraries in the state was born out of conviction that libraries which really are our life long educational institutions are a sine qua non what is the many faced-development of community life."[97]

These "Sanghams" were an association of libraries responsible for fixing the grade of libraries and for distributing Government grants to these libraries according

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[94] Neyyattinkara (1925), Trivandrum (1933), Neyyoor (1937), and Calicut (1937).

[95] R Raman Nair, Origins of People's Library Movement in Kerala, 4 GRANTHANA 29, 35 (1993).

[96] Bavakutty, *op. cit.,* 68.

[97] PN Panicker, Library Movement in Kerala, 13 HERALD OF LIBRARY SCIENCE 253 (1974).

to their grades.[98] The various Sanghams, in collaboration with the government, embarked on campaigns to revitalize libraries and bring them back to life. They organized a range of cultural events, including specialized night schools. Their overarching goal was to establish libraries in every panchayat ward, along with associated clubs catering to different groups.[99] Given their successful work, they were recognized by the State as the representative of all public libraries and reading rooms in the State.[100]

The Dewan of Travancore showed a keen interest in this movement and provided the All-Travancore Sangham with some funds to help establish new libraries and invigorate existing ones. With the government patronage, the number of affiliated libraries continued to increase, and in 1948, the Government distributed INR 10,695 as grant to 116 affiliated libraries. The All-Travancore Sangham rose to prominence following the merger of the State of Travancore with Cochin and the subsequent formation of

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[98] Bavakutty, *op. cit.,* 68.

[99] Ananth Krishna, How P N Panicker Single-Handedly Transformed Kerala's Literacy Landscape, SWARAJYA MAGAZINE (December 27, 2017).

[100] A. Sreedhara Menon et al., *op. cit.,* 686.

the State of Kerala in 1956. With their membership expanding to approximately 5000 libraries, most of which were established through the Sangham's own initiatives.[101] These libraries, its patrons and the Sangham played a pivotal role in advocating for library legislation in Kerala. Originally conceived as a platform for library cooperation, the Sanghams underwent continual transformation and restructuring throughout the history of the Kerala Library Movement. Their evolution involved aiding and mobilizing the state administration to develop, organize, and advance the cause of libraries within Kerala.

5.2. Library Movement and the Nationalist Struggle in Kerala

The Kerala public library movement, intimately linked with the surge of national political awareness, found its roots in the mobilization of a literate population. As India's populist nationalist struggle gained momentum, it's unsurprising that Kerala's library movement became intertwined with this broader awakening. The libraries, and the overarching movement served a crucial role in shaping public opinion and disseminating political messages. As political activists

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[101] Raman Nair, *op. cit*.

utilized public libraries, especially in rural areas, to disseminate their activities, these spaces evolved into hubs for social education.[102]

Concurrently, the broader national movement kindled a fervour for daily news updates. This led to the libraries emerging as centres for civic and social interactions. Many new newspapers such as Malayala Manorama (1890), Kerala Kaumudhi (1911) and Matrubhoomi (1923) gained significant circulation in the state of Kerala.[103] Affluent rural households and areas with access to newspapers became arenas for community engagement. Responding to this demand, the locales gradually evolved into small community-funded libraries without any outside support.[104] The Sugunaposhini Library in Trivandrum (1880) was the pioneering instance of this grassroots library movement.[105]

PN Panicker speaks about starting one such library, Sanathana Dharma Vayanasala: "only a few important

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[102] *Id.* at 31.

[103] *Id.* at 32.

[104] R. Raman Nair, ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN KERALA, (International Congress on Kerala Studies, 1994).

[105] *Id.*

wealthy persons could subscribe to newspapers in villages. Due to my thirst to know about the social and political movements that were blowing around I somehow managed to subscribe a newspaper at my house. It was 'Sreevazhumkodu National Daily.' Five to eight persons assembled every day at my house and they asked me to read the paper aloud… I used to read to them biographies of great men in days when we missed the paper. Sri P.N. Madhavan Pillai, a friend of mine, subscribed two other dailies and he had a small collection of books. Pooling together these books and newspapers in a small room freely rented out for the purpose, we started a small library."[106]

The library morphed beyond repositories of newspapers, transforming into hubs for communal activities. Gatherings in reading rooms featured the oral reading of newspapers, fostering analytical discussions that occasionally veered into political debates. These libraries took a step further by launching adult education programs and nocturnal classes, effectively evolving into centres of socio-political interaction. Following the Civil Disobedience movement (1931), young activists emerging from incarceration

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[106] Raman Nair, *op. cit.,* 33; Ranjith, *op. cit.,* 69.

recognized the potency of public involvement in advancing the nationalist cause. Many of these individuals would later ascend to leadership positions within the Communist Party of India, thereby cementing the library movement's importance. By 1935, the left-wing had eclipsed moderates and rightists in Kerala, attributed in part to their extensive public service initiatives. These included night classes and library establishments that effectively rallied laborers and peasants. Trade unions, kisan unions, and student organizations began taking shape by 1937, all of which relied on the library movement as a conduit for their respective causes.

In the introductory section of this paper, we referred to Marcell Mars and Tomislav Medak's idea of the library as a "fighting concept," by which they mean that libraries are inherently radical institutions that destabilise established hierarchies of power and knowledge. We see evidence of this in the Kerala libraries movement. These libraries served as pivotal platforms for various social movements, which were in turn fuelled by the growth of Western Education in the state.[107] In the early 20th century, Kerala

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[107] Raman Nair, *op. cit.,* 31.

saw the emergence of caste-based organizations and political parties that renounced antiquated social norms, advocating modern ideas of reform. Concurrently, movements against untouchability gained traction, obsolete social regulations were challenged, and labour unions gained ground. All these movements converged within the library movement, leveraging its reach to propagate their messages, advocate for administrative reforms, and mobilize public support. These advocates of social and cultural change, infiltrated the existing public libraries and established new ones. The poems and stories from the Progressive Literary Movement were usually circulated through these libraries. Dramas were staged to attract people into the national movement, and the literature published by trade unions, nationalist leaders, women's organisation flowed into these libraries. Libraries eventually became the most important educational and cultural centres of a locality and attained almost the same position occupied by temples in medieval Kerala.[108]

By the onset of the Second World War, Travancore had achieved noteworthy industrial progress, exemplified by

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[108] *Id.* at 35.

the operational Travancore Rubber Factory inaugurated in August 1925. The outbreak of the war spurred an escalated demand for novel goods, prompting focused efforts in promoting oriental industries within the regions of Travancore and Cochin. Post the war, these relatively industrialized areas witnessed the flourishing of communication media. A slew of fresh magazines and newspapers emerged, encompassing coverage of local, national, and international occurrences. This surge in media consumption led to an increasing reliance on these sources for information dissemination. This shift acted as a catalyst for the inception and advancement of library movements across diverse corners of Kerala. Consequently, this era saw the establishment of numerous library organizations, ultimately realigning and fortifying the overarching Kerala Library Movement.

A defining moment showcasing the library movement's significance in Kerala's socio-political transformation emerged during World War II. In 1939, as the Indian National Congress boycotted the British Government, and the Kerala Congress joined. The foreign administration in turn destroyed libraries that were viewed as hubs of

socialist and communist propaganda. Notably, during the Quit India Movement in 1942, several political leaders were arrested. Fleeing persecution, some of these leaders were supplied with a lot of reading materials during their hiding. At the same time At the same time some young men met secretly at different places, where they read nationalist agenda and conduced discussions. Both of these places, gathered significant reading materials and were later converted into libraries and reading rooms.

6. Ranganathan as a Legislator

The previous sections provided some background of the cultural and political milieu, which significantly shaped Dr. Ranganathan's vision for a library movement. While formalising and reviewing his philosophy for the library movement, he remained acutely aware of the historical context within which this movement developed. When was developing a national plan for the movement he remarked that, "The ambition and endeavour of the present generation in India should be to bring every province to the

level of Baroda."[109] Despite his appreciation of Baroda's library system, he cited its eventual decline to argue that mere administrative motivation without constitutional provision cannot develop and sustain a library movement. This tell him towards a crusade for securing library legislations.

Dr. Ranganathan viewed libraries as a means of universal and perpetual learning. With informal instruments of education, such as family and community losing their relevance and formal instruments such as school and colleges being unable to cater to the ideal of lifelong learning, libraries were posited to serve as a semi-formal bridging instrument. By providing the flexibility of operating without timetables and a teacher's ferrule, and providing guidance and structure through trained staff, libraries could become spaces of lifelong self-directed

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[109] S. R. Ranganathan, SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF LIBRARIES IN INDIA (Oxford University Press, 1946), 145-149.; *See also* S. R. Ranganathan, THE FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE (Madras Library Association, 1931), 224.. While our Bengalee brethren have formed a Library Association to spread the message of the Second Law in their province, it must be stated that it is only in Baroda that it has been given the fullest facilities to provide BOOKS FOR ALL.

learning.[110] However, when Dr. Ranganathan came back to India, and entered the Indian library movement, the movement found itself struggling, both institutionally and philosophical. The fervour of library futures had not found its footing in the Indian populist nationalist agenda. To counter this philosophy, Dr. Ranganathan sought to rely on state action. His framing of the library as a semi-formal instrument of education supplementing formal schools, allowed libraries to participate in the welfare and education agenda of the State. Through this participation, the library movement could stake a claim to developmentalist agendas of the state, and argue in favour of a library legislation. He argued that, "Practically in all the countries of the world, there is a Public Library Act in force which creates not merely stray libraries, however big, but also libraries in mass, libraries in myriads, throbbing with this new idea and radiant with the effulgence due to the possession of the new gospel, books for all."[111] He believed that once state action

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[110] Role of Library in Education: Need for State Aid, Mr. S.R. Ranganathan's Lecture on November 21, 1930, THE HINDU SPEAKS ON LIBRARIES (1992), 48.

[111] *Id.*

fostered the library movement, it will find "further food in the natural soil of public opinion."[112]

The importance of the state's legislative participation in the library movement was a consistent theme in Dr. Ranganathan's works. Even before joining the national library movement, sailing back from his study-cum-exploration tour in England, he amused "I sailed back home in June 1925. My mind was preoccupied with one thought: How to secure the device of library service for the cultivation of the mental resources of India? How to convince our people about it is possibility? How to secure the necessary foundation of library legislation?"[113] With the exception of Baroda's princely state, the progress of libraries remained stagnant in the first quarter of the 20th century. Across the nation, bureaucrats cited diverse reasons—ranging from political climates to financial constraints—to hinder the library movement.[114] Even

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[112] S. R. Ranganathan, LIBRARIES AND LIBRARY MOVEMENT, 10 CURRENT SCIENCE 11 (1941).

[113] Asit Ranjan Biswas & N. Balakumari., Ranganathan's Influence on Library Legislation in India, DR. S.R. RANGANATHAN: A TRIBUTE ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS (CALCUTTA: THE NATIONAL LIBRARY,1993), 21.

[114] ROLE OF LIBRARY IN EDUCATION, *op. cit.*.

Baroda's once-prominent library momentum faded after its leader's demise. Drawing wisdom from the Baroda experience,[115] Dr. Ranganathan turned to state intervention to counteract the stagnation plaguing the Indian library movement.[116] His vision of the future of library movement in India entailed an "integrated nation-wide grid of public libraries, giving free book service to one and to all citizens-literate and illiterate."[117] The creation of such a network would require administrative support at three levels-federal, provincial and local. Dr. Ranganathan explained the role of each of these bodies as, "The essential ferment will have to come from the provinces, while actual service to the public will be done by the local bodies; the federal

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[115] S. R. Ranganathan, Library Way for India, LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN INDIA (Delihi Library Association, 1957), 19, 28–30. The first library system in India was built by Gaekwad Sayajirao Baroda. That was half a century ago. It progressed splendidly during his lifetime. But it began to fade after his death. This has been due to the wrong way of basing a state library system on administrative measures. These all subject to all the stresses and strains in political changes, party politics and wins and fancies of the person in power.

[116] ROLE OF LIBRARY IN EDUCATION: NEED FOR STATE AID, MR. S.R. RANGANATHAN'S LECTURE ON NOVEMBER 21, 1930, *op. cit.*

[117] Mohinder Partap Satija, Ranganathan and the Public Library Legislation in India, 37 LIBRI, 308 (1987),.

agency will be concerned (less arduously) only with inter-provincial co-ordination and international co-operation.*"[118]*

6.1. The idea of library legislation

Before 1930, Indian libraries functioned as unitary and independent entities. Dr. Ranganathan revitalized this idea when he was invited to take charge of the Library Section of the First All-Asia Educational Conference held in Benaras in 1930. It was in Benaras that he pioneered the campaign for library legislation in India and presented a Model Library Act.[119] The Model Act provided a detailed hierarchical arrangement of libraries with the State Central Libraries at the apex followed by district, city, town and village libraries.[120] The Act contained many compulsory clauses. From the establishment and maintenance of public libraries to the generation of funds for the libraries through grants and cess, every measure was couched in compulsory language. The bill was eventually published in 1931, and

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[118] S. R. Ranganathan. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF LIBRARIES IN INDIA, *op. cit.*,168.

[119] Published in S. R. RANGANATHAN, THE FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE (Madras Library Association,1931), 256–271; *See also* S.R. Ranganathan, International Book Year: Thought on the Year, 8 LIBRARY SCIENCE WITH A SLANT TO DOCUMENTATION, NO. 4 (1971), 290.

[120] Partap Satija, *op. cit.,* 4.

became the "seed out of which the library legislation grew in India."[121] Dr. Ranganathan published various amendments to the Model Act with the last one being published in 1972.[122]

The Model Act[123] proposed establishing essential bodies and offices, like the Bureau of Library Service, Director of Libraries, and an Advisory Committee. These entities were entrusted with governing the library legislation in the State of Madras. The Model Act also created Local Library Authorities for each administrative division of Madras,[124] and obligated the Authority to maintain and keep efficient all Public Libraries within its area. The Local Library Authority was also entrusted to provide, maintain and upgrade library buildings, along with maintaining the provision for books, magazines and other material.[125] One

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[121] *Id.* at 309.

[122] For further details *see* Velaga Venkatappaiah, MODEL LIBRARY LEGISLATION: MODEL PUBLIC LIBRARY ACT AND RULES MADE THEREIN FOR THE CONSTITUENT STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES (Concept Publishing Company: 1994), 36–45.

[123] S. R. Ranganathan, SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF LIBRARIES IN INDIA, OP. CIT., 167.

[124] Section 4

[125] Section 13

of the noteworthy elements of the Model Act was its provision for library financing. A Local Library Authority was empowered to determine and collect a library-rate,[126] accept endowments[127] and raise loans.[128] Additionally, the local government was required to provide a contribution equal to the previous year's total expenditure of the Local Library Authority.[129]

With a clearly detailed library system with a designated source of funding, the Model Act clarified that no charge shall be made for admission to a Public Library.[130] Thus giving effect to Ranganathan's vision of a universally accessible semi-formal public space where "The epithet 'public' denotes in the first place that such libraries are maintained at public expense—out of local rates and the state taxes. Since their benefits accrue to the community as a whole, the community supports them. It also denotes that

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[126] Section 17(2)(a)

[127] Section 15

[128] Section 18

[129] Section 17(a)(f)

[130] Section 14.

their service is free to the public: they levy no subscriptions or fees. The service they render to any individual is solely dependent upon his capacity to benefit by it and has nothing to do with the length of his purse."[131]

6.2. Attempts at library legislation in States

The first Indian legislator to give notice of the Library Bill to the extant British Government was a library patron from Bengal, Kumar Munindradeb Rai Mahasai. In 1931, on his return journey from Benaras, where the Model Library Act was presented, Rai Mahasai convinced Dr. Ranganathan to draft a Public Library Bill for the state of Bengal.[132] Soon after, Mahasai applied for the Viceroy's permission to introduce the Bill into the Bengal Legislature. Owing the compulsory clauses in the Bill, the Viceroy blocked the introduction of the library bill.[133]

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[131] S. R. Ranganathan, SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF LIBRARIES IN INDIA, op. cit., 156.

[132] S. R. Ranganathan, Kumar Munindradeb Rai Mahasai, 6 BENGAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION BULLETIN, VOL-06, 1947, AT 2; S. R. Ranganathan, LIBRARY LEGISLATION HANDBOOK TO MADRAS LIBRARY ACT (Madras Library Association, 1953), 31-32.

[133] SN Srivastava, Library Legislation in India,, 22 INDIAN LIBRARIAN (December 1967); *See also* LIBRARY SCIENCE WITH A SLANT TO DOCUMENTATION 1971-12, *op. cit.,* 7.

While the Model Library Act was not translated in Bengal's statute book, the promise of a legislative supported library movement was gaining traction in Madras. The then Governor of Madras, Sir George Stanley showed interest in introducing the Library Bill before the legislature. On Sir Stanley's affirmation, Dr. Ranganathan and Madras Library Association redesigned the Model Library Act and changed the compulsory clauses to permissive ones. The most important change was made regarding the financing of libraries which was made optional instead of obligatory.[134] On the rejection, Dr. Ranganathan exclaimed, "When I heard about this, I behaved exactly like the proverbial cat which had once burnt its lips with boiling milk."[135] Learning from their Bengal experience, Dr. Ranganathan along with the Madras Library Association transformed the character of the Bill from compulsory to permissive. The most important amendment of the bill was related to the

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[134] KM Sivaraman, March of Library Legislation in Madras, in LIBRARY SCIENCE TODAY: RANGANATHAN FESTSCHRIFT, VOL. 1 : PAPERS CONTRIBUTED ON THE 71ST BIRTHDAY OF DR S R RANGANATHAN (Prithvi Nath Kaula ed., 1965), 388.

[135] S. R. Ranganathan, LIBRARY LEGISLATION HANDBOOK TO MADRAS LIBRARY ACT (Madras Library Association, 1953), 132.

financial clause, which was also made permissive.[136] Members of MALA secured permission from the Governor of Madras to introduce the bill in the legislative council, and it was eventually introduced in 1933. After discussions within the legislative council, the Bill was referred to a Select Committee. At this state, a member of the Indian Civil Service, the Secretary of the Local Self Government, introduced an extra-ordinary amendment. He suggested that "If the Bill becomes an Act, the Local Self Government Secretariat would have to spend some extra money on stationery, postage and clerical work in corresponding with the District Boards and the Municipalities, which would become Local Library Authorities. The amendment was that the Act should make it obligatory for the Local Bodies to pay this petty sum back to the Government."[137] After this amendment, MALA sought to withdraw the bill. However, with the introduction of the Government of India Act, 1935,

[136] Sivaraman, *op. cit.* at 388 .MALA conducted a very extensive propoganda campaign and courted popular public support in fabour of the bill. .

[137] LIBRARY SCIENCE WITH A SLANT TO DOCUMENTATION, *op. cit.,* 32. Dr. Ranganthan commented that the officer "invoked all the ingenuity of an Indian Civil Service man to deivse methods for killing the Bill. LInguistic jealousy helped him."

the State Legislatures were dissolved and the bill reached its inevitable conclusion.[138]

MALA and Dr. Ranganathan made a second attempt to introduce library legislation in Madras in 1937. However, the additional burden on the finances of the presidency motivated the Governor to refuse permission for introducing the bill in the Legislative Assembly.[139] Commenting on the failed attempts for library legislation Dr. Ranganathan expressed his contempt towards the British Government:

> "*In our country, the seed for library legislation was sown as far back as 1930- even during the British period. It was in the form of my Model Library Act… From that time till 1946, we have been endeavouring to introduce library legislation in two of our Constituent States. But every time the foreign Government, not interested in our people being enlightened and informed, somehow of the other*

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[138] *Id.* at 33. Dr. Ranganathan suggested that "this averted the catastrophe of a very strange Library Act."

[139] Sivaraman, *op. cit.* 21.

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> *blocked library legislation by one means or another.*"[140]

Unfortunately for the library movement, Dr. Ranganathan's experience in Bengal and Madras tracked in various other parts of the country as well. In the State of Bombay, a Bombay Presidencies Library Bill was introduced in 1936. The library patron, S.K. Bole, had already taken prior approval from the Governor-General as well as the Governor to introduce the bill in the legislative assembly. However, the Library Development Committee of Bombay stifled the bill without providing any cogent reasons.[141] Dr. Ranganathan made another attempt at courting a library legislation for the State of Bombay in 1946. He sent a library bill to the Chief Minister of Bombay and sent repeated reminders to enquire about its progress. However, his efforts did not garner any responses. Speaking about his experience with legislation in Bombay, he later remarked,

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[140] A Neelameghan & S. R. Ranganathan, PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM INDIA, SRI LANKA, UK, USA COMPARATIVE LIBRARY LEGISLATION (Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science Series, 1972), 385.

[141] Murari Lal Nagar, INDIAN LIBRARY SCENE AS SEEN AT THE DAWN OF INDEPENDENCE (Missouri: International Library Center, 1990).

"perhaps the committee, bundled all the reminders with the bill and buried them amidst the files."[142]

In the state of Madhya Pradesh, the bill was rejected because "there are a very few libraries in existence and there is no likelihood of many being established in the near future."[143] On the other hand, in 1947, when a library bill was proposed for the state of Travancore, the bureaucracy responded, "we do not think that a Library Act is necessary. We have already many libraries."[144] The arguments given by the bureaucracy for the rejection of library law were reflective of their opposition to the cause of library legislation.

Apart from Bihar and Bombay, Dr. Ranganathan and other patrons of the public library system prepared library bills for Uttar Pradesh (1960 & 1964), Maharashtra (1963 &

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[142] Shyam Nath Srivastava, *Library Legislation in India,* 4 INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY REVIEW 329 (1972).

[143] Nagar, *op. cit.,*29; Asit Ranjan Biswas & N. Balakumari , Ranganathan's Influence on Library Legislation in India, *in* DR. S.R. RANGANATHAN: A TRIBUTE ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS (National Library Calcutta,1993), 21.

[144] R Raman Nair, Ranganathan and Public Library System, 1 INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE LIBRARIANSHIP AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS 127 (1996).

1967), Kashmir (1951 & 1966), Delhi (1955), Punjab (1947, 1962, 1964), Kerala (1959), Assam (1964).[145] Despite some support, none of these bills were translated into the statute book.

While the movement faced disappointment in Bengal, the promise of a legislatively supported library movement was gaining traction in Madras. The then Governor of Madras, Sir George Stanley showed interest in introducing a library bill before the legislature. On Mr. Stanley's affirmation, Dr. Ranganathan and the Madras Library Association redesigned the Model Library Act and changed the compulsory clauses to permissive ones. The most significant change in the bill came from the relegation of financing clauses to option instead of being obligatory.[146] Before introducing the bill in the legislative assembly, MALA circulated the bill before the Local Bodies and the Press. While on the one side, the abandonment of the

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[145] For details on each of the library acts see: M.A. Gopinath, History of Library Legislation in India, *in* S. R. Ranganathan & A Neelamedhan (eds.), PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM: INDIA, SRI LANKA, UK, USA COMPARATIVE LIBRARY LEGISLATION (Bangalore: Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science, 1972), 12; Nagar, *op. cit.,* 4; Raman Nair, *op. cit.,* 32.

[146] KM Sivaraman, MARCH FOR LIBRARY LEGISLATION IN MADRAS, *op. cit.*

compulsory nature of the bill drew some criticism from the press, the critics of the library bill derided the increased incidence of taxation proposed by the bill.[147]

The first victory in terms of library legislation came from Madras in 1949. In 1946, Dr. Ranganathan met with the Minister of Education for Madras and handed him a draft library bill. Later in 1947, the Minister informed him that he modified the draft bill for introducing it to the legislature. While Dr. Ranganathan was not entirely satisfied with the amendments, he accepted the bill "in his anxiety to have a Library Act for Madras."[148] It was introduced to the Legislature in 1948 and became an Act on January 29, 1949. The law was terribly mutilated and Dr. Ranganathan remarked that the Act suffered from under-development at several levels- administrative, directional and organizational operation.[149] He extensively discussed how the bill compared to his Model Act and demonstrated how it has been made ineffective. Nevertheless, he continued to work for its amendment. Giving all credit for

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[147] *Id.*

[148] Gopinath, *op. cit.,* 17–18.

[149] Nagar, *op. cit.,* 29.

the legislation to MALA, he commented that "*it is an irony of life that this great aspiration was fulfilled when the Madras Library Association was nearly defunct.*"[150]

After Madras led the way by enacting the first library legislation, Hyderabad (1955), Andhra Pradesh (1960), and Mysore (1965) swiftly followed suit. Karnataka joined this movement as the fourth state to pass library legislation. Dr. Ranganathan played a pivotal role once again, spearheading the Karnataka library initiative. In 1962, he co-founded the Karnataka Library Association, which successfully advocated for a Library Committee to craft a comprehensive Library Bill and Development Plan. Under Dr. Ranganathan's leadership as chairman, the committee drafted an extensive Library Bill. The government embraced the resulting proposal, leading to the enactment of the Karnataka Public Library Act, 1965. This act stood out for its improved financial clauses compared to those of Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh.

The financial clauses of the Act prosvided a more *"realistic, and practicable"* approach when compared to

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[150] M.P. Satija, Public Library Planning and Legislation in India: Role of S.R. Ranganathan, 39 SRELS JOURNAL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT 255, 262 (2002).

the preceding Acts.[151] The Karnataka Library System drew financial resources from two sources: 1. The levy of a library cess as a surcharge on various tax provisions in the state, 2. A three per cent contribution from the land revenue collected in the state. The funds so collected are maintained by the State, District or City Library, which were the focal points in providing library service throughout the state.[152] Notably, it established the Karnataka Library Service, effectively centralizing the state's library service.[153]

6.3. Model Union Act:

Beyond his contributions to State Library Acts, Dr. Ranganathan also championed library legislation at the

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[151] G.B. Hombal & S.H. Chandanagoudar, Financial Resources of the Indian Public Library System, *in* C. Palanivelu & KS Raghavan (eds), EDUCATION THROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES- A PRACTICAL APPROACH (Tamil Nadu: Directorate of Public Libraries (1991), 38, 171–179.

[152] Surynath U. Kamath (ed.), KARNATAKA STATE GAZETTEER PART II (Government of Karnataka, 1983), 747.

[153] R. Raman Nair, SR Ranganathan and the Public Library System, 32 HERALD OF LIBRARY SCIENCE 21, 25–27 (1993).

Union Level.[154] He emphasized that a "Union Library System is absolutely necessary as something that binds together and supplements the resources of the library systems of each one of the Constituent States."[155] he chance to realize this vision emerged in 1948 when the Government of India formed a committee to explore establishing a National Central Library. As a member of the Committee, Dr. Ranganathan presented a Thirty-Year Development Plan and a Union Library Bill to the committee.[156] His Union Library Bill envisioned National Central Libraries, including a National Copyright Library, a

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[154] The concept of a National Library Committee or National Library Board can be traced back to the writings of Dr. S.R. Ranganathan as early as 1944.In his book Post-War Reconstruction of Libraries in India Ranganathan suggested that the Imperial Library, Calcutta might be recognised as the National Central library, which should be a deposit library for receiving a copy of all Indian publications and also a copyright library for receiving a second copyright copy of any book published anywhere in India. See P.B. Mangla and Sudhendu Mandal, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, INDIA: AN INTELLECTUAL RESOURCE (Kolkata: The National Library, 2006), 22.

[155] Velagā Veṅkaṭappayya,INDIAN LIBRARY LEGISLATION, VOLUME 1: UNION LIBRARY BILLS AND ACTS (Daya Publishing House, 1990), 54

[156] Velagā Veṅkaṭappayya, INDIAN LIBRARY LEGISLATION, *op.cit.*, 37. "I had drafted a Union Library Bill for consideration by the Committee to prevent desultory talk." ; For details of the Union Library Bill, see: B. P. Barua, National Library Board : A Focal Point of National Library System, *in* P. B. Mangla & Sudhendu Mandal (eds),THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, INDIA: AN INTELLECTUAL RESOURCE (Kolkata: The National Library, 2006), 22-24.

National Dormitory Library, National Service Library, National Seafarers Library, and National Central Libraries, each serving distinct and essential roles.[157]

However, discussions within the Committee stagnated, and unfortunately, the Bill met an untimely end. Dr. Ranganathan attributed the failure to the bureaucratic structure of the Committee, which lacked expertise in library matters. He remarked:

> *"In the case of the Committee on National Central Library, however, there is. the additional fact of its having been made a Cinderella and entrusted to a bureaucracy without any understanding of its social potency and with eyes at the back instead of the front. I am led to believe that the Library matter will have no chance whatever unless the Minister for Education takes an independent Library Adviser who has professional knowledge and faith in the*

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[157] BP Barua, Library Legislation and Ranganathan, *in* T. S. Rajagopalan (ed.), RANGANATHAN'S PHILOSOPHY—ASSESSMENT, IMPACT AND RELEVANCE (Vikas Publishing House, 1985), 659, 665–666.

potency of Library Service and the necessity for it. "[158]

On losing faith in the bureaucracy, Dr. Ranganathan turned towards the masses who he believed recognized the social significance of libraries, and published the Bill in a book titled Library development plan: Thirty-year programme for India, with draft library bills for the Union and the constituent States in 1950.[159]

Regrettably, the tapestry of the National Library System that Dr. Ranganathan wove remains, as of yet, unfurled in reality. Amongst the 28 states, only 19 have enacted library legislations which aim to create a library service, while no corresponding legislation has been established at the union level[160] or for the benefit of union territories.[161] The

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[158] S. R. Ranganathan, LIBRARY LEGISLATION HANDBOOK TO MADRAS LIBRARY ACT, *op. cit., 158.*

[159] The Bill was later published in S. R. Ranganathan, THE FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE (Madras Library Association, 1957), 226–236.

[160] While a National Library Act was enacted in 1976, the Act does not talk about creating an integrated system of libraries in India.

[161] Vinay Preedip Balaji& Mohan Raju J S, A POLICY REVIEW OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN INDIA (Bengaluru: Indian Institute for Human Settlements, 2018).

following table enlists the catalogue of library acts with their years of enactment:

Madras (Tamil Nadu)	The Tamil Nadu Public Libraries Act, 1948 (Act 24 of 1948)
Hyderabad	The Hyderabad Public Libraries Act, 1955 (Repealed, 1961)
Andhra Pradesh	The Andhra Pradesh Public Libraries Act, 1960 (Act VIII of 1960)
Karnataka	The Karnataka Public Libraries Act, 1965 (Act 10 of 1965)
Maharashtra	The Maharashtra Public Libraries Act, 1967 (Act 34 of 1967)
West Bengal	The West Bengal Public Libraries Act, 1979 (Act 39 of 1979)
Manipur	The Manipur Public Libraries Act, 1988 ((Act 7 of 1993))
Haryana	The Haryana Public Libraries Act, 1989 (Act 20 of 1989)
Kerala	The Kerala Public Libraries Act, 1989 (Act 15 of 1989)
Mizoram	The Mizoram Public Libraries Act, 1993 (Act 4 of 1993)
Goa	The Goa Public Libraries Act, 1995 (Act 14 of 1995)
Gujarat	The Gujarat Public Libraries Act, 2001 (Act 25 of 2001)
Orissa	The Orissa Public Libraries Act, 2002 (Act 3 of 2002)
Uttarakhand	The Uttarakhand Public Libraries Act, 2005 (Act 57 of 2005)
Rajasthan	The Rajasthan Public Libraries Act, 2006 (Act 11 of 2006)
Uttar Pradesh	The Uttar Pradesh Public Libraries Act, 2006 (Act 21 of 2006)

Bihar	Bihar State Public Libraries and Information Centres Act, 2008 (Act 17 of 2008)
Chhattisgarh	The Chhattisgarh Public Libraries Act, 2008 (Act 20 of 2008)
Arunachal Pradesh	The Arunachal Pradesh Public Libraries Act, 2009 (Act 6 of 2009)
Telangana	The Telengana Public Libaries Act, 1960 (Amended and Modified 21st December, 2015)

While the origins of the public library movement in India can be traced back to early 19th century, with the State of Baroda,[162] the development of public libraries in the country remains staggered and divided.[163] Since independence, the importance of libraries have been recognized in almost every five-year plan,[164] and multiple committees have been set up to examine how the public library movement can be fostered in India.[165]

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[162] Murari Lal Nagar & M. A. Sahityacharya, PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN BARODA 1901-1949 (Missouri: International Library Center, 1969).

[163] Maitrayee Ghosh, The Public Library System in India: Challenges and Opportunities, 54 LIBRARY REVIEW 180 (2005).

[164] Ajit Kumar, National Policy-Commission on Library and Information System and Services in India: Past, Present, and Future, 37 JOURNAL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE 91 (2012).

[165] See Committees and Commissions in India on Libraries and Library Science Education in India, LIBRARIANSHIP STUDIES AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (MAY 1, 2020).

7.   Conclusion: Library Policy–A perspective from Above, Below and Within

Our narrative began with the image of the librarian as an unacknowledged legislator of post colonial democracies and it is befitting, having traversed the history of libraries and librarians in India, to remind ourselves, why this image offers us a powerful way of evaluating the success and failure of policies in promoting public libraries as a civic institution at a time when we increasing hear laments of the decline of the library in public life. It is unfortunate that the contemporary role of librarians have been reduced to a techno-bureaucratic function when historically, it is evident that librarians have played a crucial role as architects of public imagination and knowledge. The idea of the library as a fighting concept as well as as of fraternal concept reminds us that the core value that determines the imagination of a library is necessarily a transformative one. It seeks to disrupt existing hierarchies of knowledge and power, by redistributing the means through which people can participate as informed citizens and critical thinkers.

On this count, libraries have much in common with the larger aims of transformative constitutionalism in post-

colonial societies. Transformative constitutionalism embodies a paradigmatic shift in constitutional discourse, moving away from the idea of Constitution as texts of power and governance to the idea of the Constitution as a site of resistance that redresses historical injustices and engenders social change. Central to this perspective is the notion of a rewriting of the social contract and inventing a new conception of the citizen, one that transcends colonial legacies, historic injustice perpetuated by trenched identities like class, caste and gender. Librarians, through their facilitation of access to knowledge similarly contribute to a process of reimagining citizenship and rewriting the social fabric.

It is not surprising that Dr BR Ambedkar, one of the primary arts of the Indian constitution was also a passionate bibliophile who was deeply committed to the idea of the library as an institution of empowerment. When, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, one of the most prominent early nationalist leaders passed away, Dr. Ambedkar responded to the news that a statue of Mehta was proposed to erected. Ambedkar wrote a letter to the Bombay Chronicle, advocating that it may be more apt to consider setting up a

public library as a memorial. "It is unfortunate", Ambedkar said " that we have not as yet realized the value of the library as an institution in the growth and advancement of a society. But this is not the place to dilate upon its virtues. That an enlightened public as that of Bombay should have suffered so long to be without an up-to-date public library is nothing short of disgrace and the earlier we make amends for it the better. There are some private libraries in Bombay operating independently by themselves. If these ill-managed concerns be mobilized into one building, built out of the Sir P.M. Mehta memorial fund and called after him, the city of Bombay shall have achieved both these purposes."[166]

We argued in this paper that by democratizing access to knowledge, and fostering inclusive spaces for dialogue and debate, libraries embody the ethos of transformative constitutionalism, empowering citizens to actively engage in the construction of a more just and inclusive society. Librarians are consequently constitutional agents whose labour resonate profoundly with the principles of transformative constitutionalism. Both are predicated on

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[166] Salim Yusufji, AMBEDKAR: THE ATTENDANT DETAILS, *op. cit.*

the recognition of the radical potential of ideas and knowledge in reshaping societal norms and institutions. And yet, it is very clear from the paper that the history of the development of libraries in India is not a singular story, and it may be more fruitful to think of three approaches to this story.

The role of Ranganathan in the promotion of library policies as well as the history of the library movement in Baroda and Travancore seem to represent one end of the spectrum -one that can be described as a vanguardist approach to the library has an institution of change. This is a perspective that is top down in nature and strongly predicated on the library has an extension of a welfare state. In contrast, some of the other histories that we have examined provide us with what could be described as rearguard approach to public libraries which are marked by a bottom up approach. What seems a little unfortunate in the history of library policy in India is that these two approaches seem to have been relatively incommensurable, running as they were, on parallel tracks. the third significant policy phenomena that we attempted to trace in the paper was the role of legislation in attaining the

democratic and transformative objectives of public libraries.

This tripartite examination, of public library development in India, through the lenses of vanguardist, rearguard, and legislative perspectives, offers us a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics that shaped the evolution of library infrastructure and services. The vanguardist paradigm, characterized by the patronage of enlightened aristocracy or enlightened individuals reflect a forward-thinking vision that leverages public resources and influence to establish libraries as bastions of knowledge and cultural enrichment. Conversely, the rearguard perspective unveils the grassroots endeavors that underpin the expansion of public libraries, with Kerala's grassroots initiatives serving as a quintessential exemplar. Here, community-led efforts, spearheaded by local leaders and activists, play a pivotal role in engendering library networks that are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of the community. This bottom-up approach underscores the significance of community empowerment and participatory engagement in fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability within library ecosystems. Finally, the

third perspective, anchored in state policy and legislative frameworks, represents a possible synthesis of vanguardist and rearguard elements. While state legislations underscore the indispensability of public libraries as fundamental pillars of democratic infrastructure, the passage of library legislations across disparate states reveal a concerted effort to institutionalize and codify library services within the ambit of governance. However, the question of whether this legislative imperative aligns more closely with vanguardist innovation or rearguard institutionalization warrants further scholarly scrutiny. Arguably, while state policies exhibit vanguardist attributes by espousing progressive ideals and promoting literacy, the legislative enactment of these policies also have a potential for incorporating a rearguard impulse. The imperative to strike a judicious balance between a vanguardist vision and rearguard pragmatism in public library development cannot be overstated. While vanguardist initiatives may catalyze innovation and propel library services into new frontiers, grassroots mobilization ensures that libraries remain responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of local communities. Similarly, state policies and legislative frameworks furnish the necessary scaffolding for the proliferation of public libraries. Thus,

the dialectic between these diverse perspectives can serve as a productive tension in a country like India.

In India, the creation and sustenance of public libraries relies as much on policy frameworks as they do on an ecosystem that nurtures the library as a vital institution of public life. As we have witnessed in the story of the development of libraries in India, sound library policies play a vital role in shaping the normative objectives, and allocating public resources towards the creation of public libraries. These policies establish guidelines for resource allocation, library management and accessibility, ensuring that libraries meet the diverse needs of the population they serve. However, effective policy is not an end in itself and clearly what is required is an approach that views the library as a 'growing organism' in the words of Ranganathan. It appears to us that one of the severe limitations of a vanguard approach to libraries was a greater emphasis on the former at the cost of the latter. Even with robust legislation and political will, the success of public libraries ultimately hinges on the cultivation of a vibrant public culture that recognizes and values them as essential democratic institutions. This public culture fosters

a sense of ownership and participation among citizens, encouraging them to actively engage with their local libraries, utilize their resources, and advocate for their continued relevance and expansion. On this barometer, the history of libraries in India is a story of partial success and partial failure. In the wake of India's Independence, the significance of public libraries in fostering public democracy was underscored by the government's strategic investments in both infrastructure and progressive legislative frameworks. While progressive library legislations were enacted to ensure their expansion, despite the initial impetus and investment, there was little done to nurture a public investment in these libraries, and their ownership and management unfortunately remained in the hands of technocrats and bureaucrats. What will it entail then, projecting into the future, to articulate a renewed imagination of the public library as a institution which is truly of the people, for the people, and by the people?

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